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ABSTRACT

Positive Adolescent Choices Training (PACT) is a health promotion program providing violence prevention programming targeted at black youth, at high risk for becoming either perpetrators or victims of violence. Conducted by the School of Professional Psychology of Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, in cooperation with Dayton Public Schools, the project builds on recent research on primary prevention programs that suggests such programs are more successful with economically disadvantaged and predominantly minority populations when developed with sensitivity to ethnic/cultural issues. PACT has developed a culturally specific version of an existing, well-tested cognitive behavioral training program to focus it directly on the problem of interpersonal violence and issues relevant to black youth. The program provides structured training on the specific behavioral components of eight social skills enhancing the capacity of adolescents to form and maintain violence-free relationships. The approach exposes participants to minority peer role models demonstrating skills to be acquired and emphasizes intensive rehearsal and practice of the target skills through videotaped role-play and psychodrama. PACT is currently being implemented with 30 middle school students. The project also provides clinical training experience for doctoral-level clinical psychology students. Pilot experiences show the ty and potential effectiveness of the approach. (Author/MSE)

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POSITIVE ADOLESCENTS CHOICES TRAINING

(PACT)

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

ABSTRACT

Positive Adolescents Choices Training (PACT) is a health promotion program developed in response to a need for violence prevention programming targeted specifically to Black youth, a group who are at high risk for becoming either perpetrators or victims of violence. Conducted by the School of Professional Psychology, Wright State University, in cooperation with Dayton Public Schools, the project builds on recent research on primary prevention programs which suggest that such programs are more successful with economically disadvantaged and predominantly minority populations when developed with sensitivity to ethnic/cultural issues. PACT has developed a culturally specific version of an existing well-tested cognitive behavioral training program to focus it directly on the problem of interpersonal violence and make it more directly relevant to the lives of Black youth. Based on the rationale that adolescents who lack skills in such areas as communication, negotiation, and problem-solving have a more limited range of response alternatives to solving relationship problems, PACT provides structured training on the specific behavioral components of eight social skills which will enhance the capacity of adolescents to form and maintain violence-free relationships. The approach exposes youth participants to minority peer role models demonstrating skills to be acquired and emphasizes intensive rehearsal and practice on the target skills through videotaped role plays and psychodramas. PACT is currently being implemented with a group of 30 youngsters (94% Black) between the ages of 12-15 in a middle school in the local public school system. Participants were referred by teachers on specific criteria such as deficiencies in social skills, history of violence within the child's family, and other risk indicators. The project also serves as a clinical training experience for doctoral level graduate clinical psychology students, toward the objective of preparing them for implementation of prevention programming for ethnic and at risk groups in future practice settings. Pilot experiences have provided evidence of the viability and potential effectiveness of the approach as one method for reducing violence among disadvantaged African American youth.

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Program

Positive Adolescents Choices Training (PACT) is a health promotion program conducted by the School of Professional Psychology, Wright State University, in cooperation with Dayton Public Schools. It was developed in response to a need for violence prevention programming targeted specifically to Black youth, a group who are at high risk for becoming either perpetrators or victims of violence. PACT uses a cognitive behavioral training approach which equips youngsters with concrete tools to aid them to resist committing acts of aggression and to lessen their chances of becoming victims of violence. The underlying rationale for this approach is that adolescents who lack social skills in such areas as communication, negotiation, and problem-solving have a more limited range of response alternatives to solving relationship problems. PACT provides structured training on the specific behavioral components of eight skills which will enhance the capacity of adolescents to form and maintain violence-free relationships. The youth training curriculum is based on a well-validated commercially available model called ASSET: A Social Skills Program for Adolescents (Hazel et al, 1981). The PACT initiative has adapted this curriculum to focus it directly on the problem of violence and make it more culturally relevant to the lives of Black youth.

PACT is currently being implemented with a group of 30 youngsters (94% Black) between the ages of 12-15 in a middle school in the local public school system. This description will review related violence prevention efforts, will highlight the need for such programming, and will report on the experiences of development and implementation, with emphasis on the special considerations needed for partnership projects between a university and a cooperating public school. Preliminary results will be described, along with recommendations for replications of the PACT approach.

Review of Related Programs

Broadly defined, violence prevention efforts might be considered to include a wide range of measures including public education on personal safety such as avoiding dark streets; legislation such as mandates to increase the length of prison sentences; and redesign of physical environments such as better lighting and TV monitors in elevators (Whitman, 1988). Such indirect prevention measures will be successful at times but are diversionary methods that do not address the causes of

interpersonal violence and ultimately have little real impact. For example, since two thirds of all violence involves perpetrators and victims who have a relationship with each other (relatives and acquaintances), crimes of violence are as likely to occur in settings thought to be "safe" such as the victim's home (Whitman & McKnight, 1985). Such crimes are not likely to be prevented by laws or by schemes to make neighborhood streets safer.

More direct violence prevention efforts may use techniques which involve interventions at the systems or the personal level (Gulotta, 1987). Systems-level interventions attempt to mobilize broad-based support to effect changes in community attitudes, policies, laws, or structures. An excellent example of this type of intervention is the community action and awareness crusade to combat Black-on-Black murder spearheaded by Dr. Carl Bell, a psychiatrist who directs a community mental health center in Chicago (Bell, 1987). Dr. Bell has been influential in initiating a mass education campaign to raise community consciousness of the problem of homicide in the Black community through such activities as radio talk show series and designation of city wide "No Crime Days." He also advocates for diverse social, economic, and mental health supports for families at risk for violence and has established several programs at his center which are directed toward reducing the abusive potential of such families (e.g., parenting classes).

The Chicago violence prevention initiatives are specifically targeted to the Black community. Such culturally specific efforts are unfortunately infrequent. Historically, programs to reduce violence in minority communities have suffered from ideological constraints such as stereotypical beliefs in the "normalcy" (i.e., inevitability and unpreventability) of violence among poor and minority Americans (Dawkins, 1987).

Culturally specific prevention programs which are client rather than systems oriented are rare as well. Youth training programs to develop positive social skills are frequently used as primary prevention strategies. Such programs aim to promote general competency and positive mental health and to help their target audience avoid emotional disturbance. They have been used successfully in a variety of settings. However, as Rhodes and Jason (1988) note in their comprehensive review of such primary prevention interventions, virtually all of the skill-based programs are targeted to white middle-class populations. For example, the Say It Straight (SIS) program of Englander-Golden and

colleagues (1989) is a school-based social skills training program which has been found to reduce a variety of destructive behaviors such as substance abuse, alcohol and drug-related school suspensions, school vandalism, and criminal offenses. Follow-up studies of trained vs. untrained students documented 4.5 times more criminal offenses in the untrained students, as well as their involvement in more serious types of offenses. However, SIS training was conducted in a small southwestern town with a population of 5000 among a student group at low risk for violent behavior. Only about 5% of the trained group and about 7% of the untrained group had prior criminal offenses. Ethnicity is not reported in the study and it is not known whether the reported success of the approach would generalize to a high risk urban and predominantly minority population. Similarly, Hansen and colleagues (1989) provide a review of social skills training programs with adolescents but do not discuss ethnicity or residency of the trained youth so that generalizability across racial/ethnic groups and rural/urban settings is a matter for speculation.

The PACT approach builds on recent research on primary prevention programs which suggest that such programs are more successful with economically disadvantaged and predominantly minority populations when developed with sensitivity to ethnic/cultural issues. Schinke and colleagues (1987,1988) have reported success in social skills training and stress management interventions with Native American, Hispanic, or Black adolescents for a variety of health behavior problems, including substance abuse and teen pregnancy. Maypole and Anderson (1987) likewise reported positive outcomes in a substance abuse prevention program designed for the particular needs of Black adolescents. The PACT program extends culturally specific training to the critical problem of interpersonal violence among Black youth.

Youth training programs which are especially directed toward the problem of violence at the primary prevention level have been reported in news media. However, reports of controlled studies gauging outcomes of these programs have not yet appeared in the professional literature. A violence prevention curriculum developed by Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, formerly the Commissioner of Public Health for the State of Massachusetts, is in widespread use in Massachusetts and other states. Originally designed only for high school students at 10th grade level or higher, a recent Robert Wood Johnson report (1989) indicates that this curriculum has now been adapted for various grade

levels. The approach utilized in this curriculum has several significant differences from the methodology of the PACT project. Dr. Prothrow-Stith's curriculum primarily uses a didactic and discussion approach to teach adolescents about the causes and effects of violence and to help them understand anger and conceptualize constructive responses to situations where violence is threatened. Its teaching techniques include limited role-playing, peer discussion, and analysis of alternatives. The PACT approach exposes trainees to peer role models demonstrating skills to be acquired and emphasizes intensive rehearsal and practice on the target skills through videotaped role plays and psychodramas. Its methodology rests on a well-established training protocol which has grown directly from the social learning/behavior deficit theory advanced by Bandura (1963). Interventions developed from this theoretical base have been validated by a variety of investigators, using diverse designs, subjects, settings, and target skills (Goldstein and Glick, 1987). Essentially, this method involves four main steps: (1) expert demonstration of the behavioral components of the target skill; (2) guided opportunities to practice competent behaviors; (3) praise, reinstruction and related feedback on skill enactment; and (4) engagement in activities designed to transfer skills to non-training settings. Another distinction between the two approaches is that PACT is specifically designed for work with Black youth rather than a general student audience.

The training methodology of this project is also supported by research on secondary level prevention/early intervention initiatives with youth who have documented histories of aggressive and violent behavior. Goldstein and Glick (1987) provide an extensive review of research on approaches to reducing aggressive behavior in juvenile delinquents. They conclude that there are three related and mutually reinforcing deficiencies identifiable in the aggressive delinquent population. First, these adolescents characteristically are lacking in a broad array of personal and social skills that collectively represent prosocial behavior. Second, there is frequently a deficiency in anger control. Third, chronically delinquent adolescents often reason at a more concrete and primitive level of moral reasoning. These investigators have developed an aggression replacement training (ART) curriculum for use with the delinquent population which consists of coordinated interventions to address all three areas of deficiency. Their rationale is built on very strong investigative evidence of the effectiveness of the structured learning/social skills training method; on a more recent tradition of

success with anger control training (e.g., Feindler et al, 1984); and on the less tested moral education approach which they conclude is more effective when employed as a contributing component of a larger intervention package. Their own experiences with ART programming offer convincing support for the effectiveness of changing youth behavior by this method while the trainees are in an institutional setting. In addition, their findings point to potential for carryover to community settings.

The multimodal ART approach represents a very comprehensive intervention which certainly merits consideration for primary as well as secondary level efforts. It would be more difficult to implement in a school setting than in an institution for delinquents, given that the latter has a rehabilitative rather than an academic mission. The realities of need for a more time-limited youth training require narrowing of intervention choices. Of the three methods identified by Goldstein and Glick, the strongest research support is for the social skills training approach. There is substantial literature demonstrating the relationship of poor social skills to aggressive behavior in children and youth (e.g., Kazdin, 1987). There is also the clearest demonstration of effectiveness in terms of skill acquisition. In their review of related research, Goldstein and Glick, for example, cited positive skill development in 90% of youth who completed programs of social skills training. In addition, they found that approximately 45-50% of trainees across diverse population types were able to transfer learning outside of the training setting.

BACKGROUND

Reporting on the homicide rates for Black adolescents and young adults, a recent Institute of Medicine study (1989) notes that "few public health problems are more urgent" (p. 52). Among Black Americans (both male and female) between the ages of 15 and 24, more deaths result from homicide than any other cause, including unintentional injuries (accidents), suicide, heart disease, and cancer (Gulaid et al, 1988). Although Black females are three times as likely as white females to die as a result of homicide, the risk for premature mortality from homicide is still greater for Black males. Recent statistics from the National Center for Health Statistics document that 35% of the year's deaths from homicide and legal executions were of Black males --nearly equal to the 39% of white males dying from these causes for the same year (reported in McBride, 1988). This figure is

particularly staggering when one considers that Black Americans comprise only 12% of the U.S. population. Probability estimates project that the likelihood of a white male being a victim or perpetrator of violence during his lifetime is 1 in 80; for Black males living in central cities, the probability is 1 in 10 (McBride, 1988).

Also overrepresented among economically disadvantaged African Americans are lesser forms of interpersonal violence. Higher rates of physical child abuse rates have been found for Black families, particularly ones who are of lower socioeconomic status (Hampton, 1987). Although many researchers have pointed out the limitations to empirical studies which have attempted to describe the nature and extent of marital violence within the Black community (e.g., Lockhart and White, 1989), it appears that the incidence of spouse abuse is also disproportionately high among poor and minority families (Asbury, 1987). Thus, Black youth are more likely to be exposed to violence within their own families or those of their friends.

Exposure to family violence has known cyclical ill effects in children who witness or are victimized by such events. For both intrafamilial and extrafamilial violence, childhood exposure seems to be an important precursor of adult violence (Gelles, 1980; Fagan & Wexler, 1984). It has been implicated as a contributor to future abuse of spouse and children (Fagan et al, 1983) and tracked as a childhood factor present in the lives of many murderers. In an indepth investigation of the characteristics of young murderers, Lewis (1985) found that 87% of those she studied had grown up with extreme family violence and repeated beatings.

At minimum, youngsters who lack competent models of successful nonviolent relationships are likely to develop patterns of deficient responses to interpersonal friction which would predict some level of violence in their lives. A recent survey of 7th graders from an inner city school with a predominantly minority population found that the vast majority of the surveyed adolescents reported that, when faced with conflict, they did not even consider any other alternatives to fighting (Landers, 1989). The youngsters interviewed could not describe any constructive ways to handle anger with a peer. As noted earlier, various investigators have identified similar deficiencies in communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution skills in adolescents who are actively exhibiting aggressive and antisocial behavior (Goldstein and Glick, 1987; Hains and Hains, 1987; Kazdin et al, 1987).

PACT was developed to address the greater circumstantial risk of interpersonal violence for Black adolescents. Since they are significantly more likely to be exposed to models of violent behavior, their opportunities to observe and learn skills which would give them appropriate and beneficial ways to deal with conflict are almost certainly reduced. The training method used is based on learning theory which suggests that modeling and rehearsal are practical ways to teach skills and are especially effective in assisting trainees to transfer skills to real-life situations.

DESCRIPTION

Project Setting, Target Population, and Pilot Experiences

PACT is implemented as an in-school training program structured into the regular school day. The selection of the school site for implementation of the violence prevention training took into account both practical and historical considerations. First, gaining the school's cooperation was facilitated by a history of other successful joint university/school initiatives. It was also felt that locating the program in this setting would eliminate many of the logistical barriers experienced by similar human service/mental health programs such as adequate space, need for transportation, access to the population for recruitment, and retention of participants. In addition, it was apparent that the personal and academic histories already collected in school records would serve both to facilitate identification of youth in need of the service and to provide the basis for evaluation of interventions, by pre-and post-comparisons. Further, there were additional personnel on site who were already involved with the youth and who would thus be well-positioned to reinforce specific program objectives.

A six-month pilot project was funded by the Ohio Commission on Minority Health. In the pilot, training was conducted with 13 Black students, aged 16-18, who were participants in an alternative school program for potential school dropouts. The first year PACT pilot provided valuable learning for the continuation of the project. First, it clearly demonstrated that the target youth for the project had high risk for problems of violence. Several of the participants were juvenile court involved and/or had lengthy histories of school behavior problems. Classroom behavior of the youth was characterized by little discipline, poor adult/child communications and relations, and poor attendance. Parent/child relations showed similar problems. By multiple

measures, the target youth demonstrated deficits in skills needed for successful personal relationships, as well as a general distrust of adults.

The pilot also identified deficiencies in the curriculum. Although the ASSET materials were generally found to be satisfactory, the videotape material accompanying the written curriculum was found to be inadequate. There were no minority role models appearing in the vignettes, and the youngsters had difficulty relating to the situations, language, and dress of the peer models who introduced the skills. In addition, scene content underemphasized situations specific to incidents of violence. For the project continuation, staff worked with a commercial videotape producer to develop a set of more relevant tapes with greater appeal and of greater value as models for Black youth.

The particular school setting chosen for the pilot turned out to be problematic. The project was implemented within a parent program for extremely dropout prone and chronically truant youth. The parent program offered neither leverage to force students to attend school nor strong incentives to encourage their voluntary attendance. Since participation in PACT was dependent upon attendance at school, completion of the full training cycle was negatively impacted by youth absence. For project continuation, an alternative site was selected which would maximize student opportunities for participation.

A continuation project was funded by the same funding source. Total funding for the project from the Ohio Commission on Minority Health has been $135,000. The continuation project, currently being implemented, is set in a middle school with a sub-group of 30 youngsters identified by school personnel as needing social skills training. These younger adolescents (12-15) share similar risk characteristics to the older youth served in the pilot. Eligibility to participate was based on the child's being a participant in a "cluster classroom" program in place at the school. Within the school, there are four cluster classrooms which serve youngsters who are perceived to be prone to have difficulties with transition from the single teacher elementary model to the traditional middle school model. Cluster classrooms are team taught and the children stay in one classroom rather than moving from room to room. From this participant pool, youth were referred by teachers on the basis of behavior problems, particularly aggression, and perceived skill deficiencies in relating to peers.

Project Objectives and Methodology

The goal of the PACT program is to reduce actual and potential violent behavior in an urban Black adolescent population. The approach used to achieve this goal is an intensive in-school program of social skills development, emphasizing skills which will help the youngsters improve their personal relationships and provide them with alternatives to violence as a response to problems. The first objective is to develop youth skills to form and maintain violence-free relationships. Target skills are: giving positive feedback; giving negative feedback; accepting negative feedback; resisting peer pressure; developing problem-solving ability; developing skills in negotiation; following instructions; and developing communication and problem-solving skills. These skills were identified by ASSET developers in consultation with probation officers, parents of teenagers on probation, and court-adjudicated teenagers on probation as being ones in which target youth demonstrated deficiencies. The skills were also rated by these sources as being important for successful interaction with both adults and peers.

The PACT project also serves as a clinical training experience for graduate psychology students. The School of Professional Psychology trains students at the doctoral and postdoctoral levels for practice as clinical psychologists. The four year training program leads to a Psy.D. degree. Graduate students serve as youth trainers in the classroom. In the continuation project, PACT serves as a formal practicum site. Thus, a second objective is to prepare clinical psychology students to be able to implement a culturally specific health promotion program in future practice settings.

A third objective is to enhance the capability of teachers of participant youth to provide in-class reinforcement of the desired social skills. Tasks to meet this objective include initial orientation for teachers and frequent coordinating meetings during active training session times for joint planning of related classroom activities.

The training program for youth is structured in a small group format. Students are introduced to specific skills and their behavioral components and given opportunities to observe peer role models demonstrating the desired behaviors and to practice the skills individually. Videotape is an important tool in this approach. Skills are introduced through videotaped vignettes. Students engage

in role plays and psychodramas which are videotaped, so that they may see themselves and their classmates as models. Each youth training group takes about 20 weeks to complete the actual training. An additional 4-6 weeks is needed for each group for warm-up/rapport-building activities; to introduce youth to project staff and to the project concept and procedures; to secure parental permission; to gather initial data on skill levels in the target intervention areas; and to allow make-up time for missed training sessions.

Efforts are made to avoid any perception of stigma associated with participation in PACT. The acronym chosen makes no reference to problem behavior of any type. When PA announcements are made regarding the project, it is referred to as the "PACT Club." An incentive system has been developed to reward active participation and appropriate behavior in training sessions (e.g., being on time; following directions; bringing in parent reports). Students are given "success dollars"--paper money which may be exchanged in the principal's office for T-shirts, gift certificates, pens, paper, cosmetics, and items of similar appeal to adolescents. A modest portion of the grant budget supports the purchase of such incentives.

Project Staffing

This project is staffed by a project director who is full-time faculty with both teaching and administrative responsibilities for the implementing academic unit. A portion of his salary is paid for by the grant, to allow release time for overall management of the project, including hiring and supervision of project staff; coordination with university fiscal and School of Professional Psychology administration; project design such as evaluation methods, curricular adaptations, and strategies for implementation; dissemination of information about the project; and grant reporting.

A part-time training coordinator (80% effort) serves as the day-to-day manager of the project. Responsibilities of this position include coordination between the participating sites; orientation, training, and supervision of the graduate students/youth trainers; scheduling and detail planning for the classroom training; collection and analysis of youth assessment and evaluation data; orientation of school personnel; youth orientation; and weekly curriculum planning.

Other part-time positions include secretarial assistance and salary support for a project evaluator who collects and analyzes evaluation data and assists with preparation of grant reports and other

external communications. Two graduate clinical psychology students serve as youth trainers for delivery of the classroom social skills training, under the supervision of the training coordinator, a licensed clinical psychologist. They have a 20% time commitment to the project. They participate in team planning and are responsible for keeping records of services provided, in addition to evaluation-related activities such as observation and rating of youth skill development.

Other staffing patterns could be utilized. For example, already degreed youth trainers could be hired who would require less clinical supervision. It might also be viable to train school personnel such as school counselors, psychologists, or classroom teachers to implement the program. In this project, the selection of this particular staffing was based on the importance placed on graduate student training. This was deemed to be an objective equal in importance to the direct service to youth. Since so few solutions currently exist to the youth violence problem, training service personnel to implement prevention programming for ethnic and at risk groups promises a much needed spread effect for future efforts.

RESULTS

Because of the previously mentioned constraints created by the pilot project setting and the ongoing status of the continuation project, full assessment of project results is not yet available. In the pilot, for example, 13 students received some level of skill training but no student completed the full training cycle. However, positive progress toward the development of the target skills was documented for the pilot trainees. Students receiving training demonstrated improvements in behavior related to the skills on which they were trained. This included both reduction in negative behavior and increase in positive behavior. Positive behaviors that were demonstrated included: responding to someone else's anger without getting angry; showing understanding of someone else's feelings; expression of warm feelings, liking, or affection with peers; and expressing themselves appropriately when voicing criticism or complaints. Negative behaviors which were reduced included: threatening; harassing; intimidating; arguing; and becoming antagonistic when complaining. Students rated their own performance higher on the target skills after they had received the training, and their performance was rated higher by both teachers and trainers on behavior checklists.

Also in the pilot, graduate student/youth trainers demonstrated skill development in such areas as problem-solving; and ability to maintain group control, to establish rapport, and to demonstrate target skills. Trainers also showed initiative in providing suggestions for improving the basic training materials and procedures for working with teachers. Project administrators learned techniques for supporting less experienced trainees and the characteristics of trainees that would best be suited to this type of project. These traits include: good oral communication and teaching skills; flexibility; resourcefulness; enthusiasm; interpersonal sensitivity; and good listening skills.

An evaluation protocol has been developed for assessment of the continuation project. This evaluation will be done in-house. It is facilitated by the videotaping of all training sessions with youth. Thus, permanent records of youth behavior can be kept, for review by multiple individuals. The planned evaluation process is as follows. Information to assess the impact of this intervention on the youth social skill level will be collected at several points. Prior to training, a profile is developed on each youth participant detailing the entry level performance on the target social skills, as rated by self, parent, teacher, and trainer. This is graphed for comparison with the exit level profile. In addition, data are collected through school records on the participants' behavioral history of aggression or violence, specifically noting involvement with juvenile court and/or incidents of behavior problems at school such as suspensions, expulsions, and emergency removals from the classroom. During training, records are kept of the level of participation (sessions attended, number of skills training completed) and of the student's behavior in and out of class during the training period. A behavioral incident checklist is kept weekly by the teacher. Parents may report behavior at home through a written or verbal report to the trainer. In addition, records of performance on the target skills during training are kept. At the end of training, exit level performance on the target social skills will be rated by the same raters (self, parent, teachers, and trainers) using the same instruments as at the entry level stage. In addition, the school behavioral records will be reviewed for new incidents of aggressive or violent behavior; specifically, it is assumed that improved social skills in negotiation, communication, etc. will give the participants tools to prevent them from initiating violence. Measures of skill development would thus be a predictor of potential for violent behavior.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based upon preliminary results, the approach seems to be a viable and potentially effective method for reducing violence among disadvantaged African American youth through interpersonal social skills training. A particular project strength appears to be the the delineation of very specific tasks for project youth trainers and intensive supervision of them in their efforts. The project is currently operating successfully on a one year budget of $75,000, which appears adequate for operational costs. Start-up costs included purchase of the copyrighted curriculum and other curriculum materials and necessary equipment, which might add another $10,000 to a beginning project. Program planners might also want to consider the merit of contracting with outside consultants for project evaluation.

Recommendations for replication include the following considerations, some of which are specific to the selection of a school site for implementation.

1. ***It is important to lay good groundwork with the cooperating partner school at all levels.*** Securing the support of top school administrators is, of course, essential, but it is equally important to build a foundation for cooperation with direct service staff, especially teaching staff. School-based projects must depend upon teachers' cooperation in scheduling, reinforcement activities, and collection of evaluation data. The realities of the intrusive and invasive nature of entering someone else's classroom need to be recognized, and special attention needs to be devoted to getting teachers to "buy in" to the project concept and to establishing not just a spirit of cooperation but specific plans for staff and teacher teamwork. Sufficient time needs to be devoted to teacher orientation, including explaining the rationale for the model, roles expected for teachers, criteria for student participation, and the schedule for project operation.

2. ***It is essential to follow good groundwork with continued communication and coordination at all levels of the partnership school.*** Mechanisms for regular communication and coordination of project staff and teachers need to be developed. Such communication should emphasize the particular skills being taught, problems with particular youngsters, and teacher-generated ideas for classroom reinforcement. It is also advisable to keep high level administrators informed of project progress, including information on problems encountered as well as successes.

3. ***A small scale pilot is highly recommended.*** The experiences of our own pilot were invaluable in improving the continuation project. Knowing both potential pitfall and success areas increased our opportunities to eliminate problems initially encountered and to duplicate what worked best. For example, we kept the best features of the curriculum but improved on it through the addition of new and more culturally relevant content. We also lengthened the amount of training time for development of each individual skill. The field site relocation has assisted us in overcoming the major difficulty we had in the pilot--regular participant attendance. By working with a slightly younger student group who are mandated to attend school, building the training into the school day, and operating in a better controlled structure and environment, opportunities are much greater for completing the full training cycle for a greater number of adolescents. We were also able to accomplish initial tasks more quickly because we had a more complete understanding of orientation needs, as well as bureaucratic constraints and how to manage them. Obviously, there will be

differences between school settings, and a pilot is an excellent mechanism for optimum development of broader programming.

The project represents only one approach to the problem of youth violence and homicide. Although the greatest negative impact is on the Black adolescents and young adults who are the most likely group to be victimized or to have to suffer the consequences of commission of violent acts, violence is expensive to all society. The financial costs related to law enforcement, court, and corrections programs are far less catastrophic than the loss of human potential. The tragic proportions of the problem compel multi-level solutions--short-term/long-term; direct/indirect; and person-centered/community-centered. Diverse methods of prevention and intervention should be tested. For example, there is need to explore multi-skills training programs which incorporate parent as well as youth education, for maximum reinforcement of newly developed skills. A vast menu of research questions awaits empirical study, beginning with crucial needs for longitudinal studies of the effectiveness of different prevention approaches. Finally, attention should be directed to the broader social and structural issues related to violence within the minority community--racism and poverty which impede equal citizenship and access to opportunity. Much research on the prevalence of violence implicates poverty as the overriding predictor of violence of all types, including murder, physical child abuse, and spouse abuse. Ultimately, community resource development, the improvement of public education, and equitable law and policy will reduce the risk of violence for all Americans.

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